

ALC 63
CAMEROON

SPEECHES

BATES COLLEGE

[21 pages]



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2 december 1991

Dear Barbara Cameron,

Hello! It has been a long time since we spoke, so I felt the need to make contact again so as to confirm our plans.

I hope that you are still interested in and able to come speak at Bates on March 11, Wednesday of International Women's Week. I have been accepted to a College Semester Abroad program, so in February I will be leaving for Australia. Thus, I unfortunately will not have the pleasure of meeting you or hearing you speak, but I'm glad I had the opportunity to help bring you to campus. There are two other co-coordinators of Womyn's Awareness (our group) and so I am writing to give you their addresses and telephone numbers. One is: Rachel Cohen

Box 123
Bates College
Lewiston, ME 04240
Ph. # (207) 784-8254

The other is Lyn Francoeur at Box 221, Bates College.
Ph. #: (207) 795-5127

Rachel has been a co-coordinator longer, so you should probably correspond with her, but feel free to contact Lyn if Rachel is unavailable.

We would greatly appreciate it if you could drop us a line ~~the~~ just to confirm that you are still planning on coming.
→

We would also be interested in knowing what topic you plan to speak on, as soon as you know.

Rachel and/or Lyn will be your contacts concerning travel and accommodations. Please let them know your needs.

I regret not being able to meet you, but I must admit, I am excited to go to Australia! Rachel is looking forward to hearing from you. Thank you, and take care.

Sincerely,
Erica Berkeley
Womyn's Awareness
Bates College

Special Thanks to:

Liz Tobin and the Women's Studies Dept.
Kenyanna and Amanda!

Deans
Campus Association
New World Coalition

GLBA

Lindsey Goodwin and Amnesty International

Amy Robbins
Paul Rosenthal

Members of Womyn's Awareness
The German Dept.
Kristin Sanderson
Rhonda Bell

Cover design by: Cindy Patric



REACHING

International Women's Week 1992

BATES
COLLEGE

Womyn's Awareness presents:

Sunday, March 8, 7:00, Chase Lounge
Kate Rushin, an African American poet/activist from the Boston area will intersperse a discussion about black and white feminists with readings from her works.
-co-sponsored by Amandla!

Monday, March 9, 8:30, Chase Lounge
Karin Dauenheimer will give a talk entitled:
"The Predicament of East German Women Since Unification."
-sponsored by the German Department and Women's Studies

Film: ENTRE NOUS, 10:00, Olin 114
-sponsored by GLBA

Tuesday, March 10, 10:30, Olin 104
Film: A documentary film about **Frieda Kahlo**, a Mexican surrealist artist.

Wednesday, March 11, 8:30, Chase Lounge
Barbara Cameron, a writer/activist from San Francisco will give a talk entitled "An American Indian Lesbian's Perspective on 1992," the 500th anniversary of Columbus.
-co-sponsored by New World Coalition, The Deans, Campus Association, GLBA

Thursday, March 12, 9:00, Chase Lounge
Coffee House focusing on women's talent; scheduled performers and open mic.

Friday, March 13, 7:00, Chase Lounge
Marjorie Agosin, a Chilean poet, will do a reading entitled "Circles of Madness/Circulos de Locura: Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo." Accompanying Agosin's reading will be a photo exhibit of the same name in Chase Hall, Benjamin Mays Gallery.
-co-sponsored with Amnesty International

the organizers
Thank Women's Awareness Week and the
Sponsors who brought me here

It's important for you to understand that
I am speaking from my experience, that
I am speaking as a Lakota and that
I do not represent all American Indians

Bates College

Speech

As I've grown older, I have noticed that time seems to go by much faster than when I was a child. I was just ten years old looking down to our garden watching my grandfather water it. Now I am 37 years old watching my ten year old son playing Nintendo.

It's 1492 and indigenous people lived in freedom, visible on the land, visible to the birds, the animals, the sky. It is 1992 and indigenous people are largely invisible in our own country. In most American minds, we are merely caricatures and mascots for sports teams, names of cars Jeep Cherokee, the Navajo, or sweet innocent savages in Dances With Wolves. New age people and charlatan shamans sell our religion, sage and sweet grass like articles of clothing from a factory outlet store.

Five hundred years is a very short time. Indigenous people have lived on this continent for at least 10,000 years. The 1800's is merely a hand ~~away~~ away, from my little child's hand touching my great-grandmother's braids or my little hand touching hers. She lived from the mid 1800's to the 1950's. By touching her, I was touching my people, my relatives whom I have never met, killed by calvary soldiers, by pioneers or dead from old, old age. My genetic memories and heritage ~~traveled~~ traveled through that touch. 2

As I've grown older, I have noticed that time seems to go by much faster than when I was a child. I was just ten years old looking down to see a garden watching my grandfather water it. Now I am 37 years old watching my ten year old son playing Nintendo.

It's 1942 and independent people lived in freedom, visible on the land, visible to the birds, the animals, the sky. It is 1942 and independent people are largely invisible in our country. In most American minds, we are mostly conservatives and advocates for sports teams, names of cars, deep churches, the Navajo, or sweet innocent savages in Dances With Wolves. How age people and Christian Scientists sell our religion, love and sweet press like articles of clothing from a factory outlet store.

Five hundred years is a very short time. Indigenous people have lived on this continent for at least 10,000 years. The 1800's is merely a land-clearing away, from my little child's hand trucking my great-grandmother's friends or my little hand trucking her. She lived from the mid 1800's to the 1870's. My trucking her, I was trucking my people, my relatives whom I have never met, killed by cavalry soldiers, by pioneers or dead from old age. My genetic marker and heritage that took.

I refer to my childhood often when I am speaking or writing. Many adults, ^{particularly women} are unraveling the pain, secrets and joys from childhood. It is important for me to give voice to my childhood, to honor my grandparents by speaking about them, to honor my family and therefore honoring my people.

Each of us has a unique history. Indian people not only have individual histories but we also share the recent 500-year history marked by suffering, tremendous loss and survival against crushing governmental policies. My grandparents shared with me many stories about their childhood, what it was like to have cannons from the forts pointed at their villages. They were forced to attend Catholic missionary schools away from family. My grandfather ran away many times, once in the blizzard cold of winter when he almost froze to death. 3

The missionary schools in particular were vicious in their attempts to destroy our culture. They did not allow Indian students to speak in their ^{own} languages. ~~They were forbidden from speaking anything but English.~~ The nuns punished the students severely if they were discovered speaking anything but English. But despite the attempts to make my grandparents submit their spirit, they were resolute in their hearts that they never surrendered to the white people, to the U.S. government or the Catholic Church. 4

Many U.S. citizens and residents will be celebrating the ^{500 year anniversary of} Christopher Columbus' discovery of this old world. The truth about his vanity and savagery will not be revealed. The country will not learn about the Indians he slaughtered, the animals he tortured, or his soldiers that he executed. ~~#~~ The Taino Indian people, of what is now called Puerto Rico, are gone. An entire people gone. Genocide. Holocaust. Termination. This is Christopher Columbus' legacy.

Sometimes people say to me or to us, why do you keep living in the past? What happened a hundred years ago or two hundred years ago was back then. It has no relevance to present day life. Doesn't the government take care of you anyway? You should feel proud and honored that there is a football team named Washington Redskins. My family has lived here for generations too. This land is just as much ours as it is yours. b

Indian people do not live in the past. Certainly not any more than anyone else. The Boston tea party is re-enacted. The civil war is made real again through movies. Pearl Harbor is commemorated annually. Japan bashing continues today. We hate them but buy their cars and electronic products, ~~likes but coming out of belt~~ and we say wonderful things about Kristi Yamaguchi.

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Holocaust. This is Christopher Columbus' legacy.

Continuing people say to me, or to me, what do you
keep doing in the past? What happened a hundred
years ago or two hundred years ago? Look there. It
has no relevance to present day life. Forget the
government too. Can of you survive? You should
get your and know that there is a football team
named Washington Redskins. My family have lived here
for generations too. This land is just as much ours
as it is theirs.

Indian people do not live in the past. Certainly not
as much as they show us. The truth is that is
to be told. The land was it made for them through
genocide. That should be remembered exactly.
After looking around today. We are here but they
are not. We are not the same people, they are not the same
people. They are not the same people.

Indian people do not live in the past any more than anyone else.

Last summer I spent my vacation traveling in New Mexico. I lived in Santa Fe before moving to San Francisco so much of the area was familiar to me. I have lived in San Francisco since 1973, ~~and~~ ~~am~~ very acculturated to San Francisco. The San Francisco Bay Area has many ~~different~~ different cultures and races of people including Indians. But we are quite invisible.

So I was struck by the visibility of Indian people in New Mexico and the amount of racist tourist items for sale. The instant Indian kit was the most popular and rubber tomahawks. It was difficult to escape from the oppressive and incredibly insensitive, rude nature to these items.

One of the places we visited was the Alamogordo Space Center where Sam the first chimpanzee ~~to~~ astronaut is buried. The space center itself is several stories high & made of glass and metal. It presents quite a contrast to the rocky, ~~desert~~ desert mountains which surround it. The space center glistens in the sun, with ^{retired} missiles jutting into the sky. As we drove up, &

I thought to myself Thank god I can enter this place and not find anything offensive about Indian people. I wandered around and had to end my visit rather quickly because I have a fear of heights and the walls are completely glass. I ~~go~~^{went} down to the Souvenir Shop hoping to find something interesting and perhaps a little bit bizarre to take home to San Francisco. I found caps commemorating Space flights, t-Shirts, space gadgets and then very neatly in one corner were the ~~Western~~ instant Indian Kits and red rubber tomahawks.

I was incredulous and knew it would be a colossal waste of time asking the ~~prof~~ space center employees what was the connection between instant Indian Kits, red rubber tomahawks and Sam the chimpanzee astronaut.

Except of course both parties had been exploited. A chimpanzee's life is no more important than the life of an Indian. And perhaps his life was viewed as more important. ~~I happen to believe in animal rights and in my mind Sam and Indians are equal.~~

We then traveled to the Mescalero Apache Indian Reservation. They ~~have a resort~~ have a resort, The Inn of The Mountain Gods. It is quite beautiful, almost serene.

My grandparents often did things as acts of defiance against the government, against assimilation. And I usually was the sole witness to these acts. It could be as simple as my grandfather cutting hay with his team of horses rather than our tractor. And I find that I also do acts of defiance.

A part of me really hated that these white people were vacationing at the Inn of the Mountain Gods yet I was pleased that the resort was successful because it provides income and ^{an avenue of} self-sufficiency for the reservation. But still as I sat and watched the white people sipping martinis, listening to the really bad country/western singer, and understanding that vacation is not a common activity for Indian people because of ^{high} unemployment, I just felt quite annoyed. I had to do my act of defiance, even if it only made me happy and it had to be something that would not offend the Apaches." I thought of our powwows and religious events. White people are always present with their cameras, taking photos and movies like it is their divine right, even after they are asked not to. So I did that too. I took my video camera and filmed white people on vacations, relaxing, drinking and smoking. They merely smiled. But I was pleased.

Another stop ^{on my New Mexico vacation} was at Fort Sumner, New Mexico. It is more famous as the burial site of Billy The Kid rather than that it was the home of hundreds of Navajo people who were forcibly marched there from Arizona. Navajo and Apache people were forced to build the fort which was home to soldiers. The U.S. government then tried to make ~~the~~ the Navajo and Apache into farmers. They ^{all} perished. I walked around the perimeter of the fort in the hot sun, trying to imagine the Indian people who built it, who died. "They had names, had families, had a home in Arizona. I stood for a long while thinking about this. Then I went into the little museum with its heralding of the Calvary."

~~It was very overwhelming~~
Outside ~~on the way~~

Outside I found a pile of stones, neatly put together in a mound ~~and~~ headed by a metal marker that simply stated the mound of rocks were in memory of the Navajos who had died. Just a few feet away were picnic tables.

The experience was very overwhelming for me. I went ~~stayed in the bathroom~~ ~~and where~~ into the bathroom where I could cry in peace and alone. Alone like most of those Navajo and Apache people ~~probably~~ felt.

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Outside Navajo

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I am often the only Indian person at events or in organizations. It is not always an easy thing. My grandparents believed very strongly in me. They wanted me to be strong, to be tough. They wanted me to model ~~Bea~~ our relative Bea Medicine who was one of the first Indian women to get a Ph.D, and who was disciplined and successful. But it is difficult for Indian people to survive in a non Indian environment.

I am fortunate that I had my grandparents who believed in me, encouraged me. But they ~~also~~ also did not want me to assimilate and forget my culture, my people. It is important, regardless of what culture or race one comes from, to have your family believe in you.

The women in my family are strong and work hard. The images of Indian women in the ^{dominant} society are very negative. We are thought of as stupid, being abused by men, savages, or we're ~~Cherokee~~ Cherokee princesses or Pocahontas leading white men to victory and adventure. Indian women are revered as wise, knowing all, being ~~a~~ a mother earth goddess, speaking words that are sacred. Some contemporary women writers ~~writers~~ steal our words, make our truth their lies.

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The women in my family are strong and work hard. The images of Indian women in the society are very negative. We are thought of as stupid, being abused by men, being, or we're these character princesses or prostitutes leading which men to victim and adventure. Indian women are revered as wise. Knowing all, being a woman with goddess, speaking words that are sacred. Some contemporary women writers refuse to let out words, make out their lives.

At women's music festivals, white women sell items that have an Indian patina to them, but are not Indian. Lesbians, in particular, are some of the worst perpetrators of this contemporary theft of our culture.

The romanticized, colorized version of us attracts people seeking spiritual redemption. They claim that their great grandmother was a Cherokee princess but would shun an Indian grandmother who is alcoholic living in a one room shack on the reservation. Romance is always more appealing than reality.

1992 represents to me the survival of Indian people, against all odds. We have survived the guns of the calvary, the disease ridden blankets of the U.S. government, the blatant racism by white people, the ignorance of us by people of color, forced sterilization of Indian women, our children being stolen by christian churches, we have survived strip mining of our lands, coal mining, reservations being used for radioactive waste dumps, and murder.

In regions where there is a large Indian population, unsolved murders of Indians occur. Law enforcement people simply don't care and even go so far as to say that we are just drunks any way. And it is true that there are drunk Indians but ~~are~~ there people in the U.S. Senate who ^{are} notorious drunks.

There are three cultural aspects common to most Indian nations and tribes that have changed a great deal ① Indian people ~~in the past~~ did not hit children ② Indian people accepted lesbians and gay men as ^{part of the people} ~~all~~ ~~part of~~ life ③ Indian people were very accepting people.

There is a great healing that is under way with Indian people. It began ~~about 20~~ about 20 years ago. The formation of the American Indian Movement ~~helped~~ served as a catalyst for the healing. Many Indian people are returning to a traditional viewpoint about life and as much as possible, live a traditional life. In an urban setting, living a traditional life is harder to do because much of our religious and spiritual beliefs involve the earth, the sky and animals. ~~But~~

Part of the healing process is to ~~embrace~~
~~try to~~ fully understand the tremendous stress
and bitterness we as Indian people inherit.
I have my grand parents stress, my great
parents stress. It gets passed from generation
to generation.

This stress is compounded in the daily living of our
lives. As a lesbian, it is ~~an~~ outrageous
that I am living in a homophobic society
and that my people lost, to a great degree,
~~that~~ acceptance of lesbians and gay men. We
had special names and sometimes a special
place. Now Indian lesbians and gay struggle
as much and perhaps more than non
Indian lesbians and gay men. Violence
against lesbians and gay men is a
common experience on the reservation but
it is also a common everywhere else.

We ^{are} losing gay Indian men to AIDS, we
are losing Indian needle users to AIDS.
Last summer I was at a conference
for ~~gay~~ lesbian and gay Indian people.
The focus of the conference was ~~AIDS~~ ^{the HIV virus}
~~the HIV virus~~ There was a certain
and AIDS.

irony about it. A roomful of Indian people who have survived genocide are fighting yet another disease.

The average life span for Indian people has risen from 42 years to 47. I consider that a victory but sad none the less.

Slowly very slowly Indian people are remembering and learning about traditions that changed or have been lost. And as we do that, as part of our healing, citizens and residents of this country must participate in this healing.

I cannot reach into hearts and souls ^{for} of Indian people and fully describe or communicate our pain, our bitterness at the loss of this country as ours. It is passed from generation to generation and sometimes is unspoken. The pain is sometimes like prairie grass rippling in the wind on a sunny day with clouds passing overhead, creating shadows down below. Or maybe it is like the evening sun setting on winter snow. There are soft hues of blue and pink against cold, crisp banks of snow.

Many about it. A handful of Indian people
who have survived genocide are fighting yet
another disease.

The average life span for Indian people has
risen from 45 years to 75. I consider
that a victory but not a success.

Slowly and steadily Indian people are remembering
and learning about traditional that changed or have
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settling on winter snow. There are soft
hues of blue and pink against cold,
crisp banks of snow.

It is like a tree forlorn in the fall, when the ~~its~~ leaves have left. It can be like the feeling of emptiness when someone ~~close~~ close has died. This pain and bitterness must heal.

My grandparents died never healed from this. They waited all ~~of their~~ throughout their life for the return of the Black Hills to us, for the honoring of the treaties made by the U.S. government. They waited for a sign. And year after year, the response ~~there~~ was bullets from white sportsmen who came onto to our land to kill wild animals.

Indian people are ⁱⁿ a healing process that is going take a very long time and will take forever if white america in particular does not begin a restitution to us.

^{simple}
There are things you can do now (P)
Stop romanticizing us
Stop stealing our religion, stop stealing our words
Leave the poor cherokees alone
Don't take our photographs without asking our permission

The healing of Indian people is very critical to our survival. We are losing many good Indian people. We have ~~one of~~ the highest suicide rate of any people. We have a high alcoholism rate. There is great despair and poverty on many of the reservations. I know because I grew up on one.

The dropout rate at universities and colleges is very high. It is alienating to leave one's people, attend a university that has little to offer in terms of cultural sensitivity or support. And if you are the only Indian, then you are expected to know everything about all native people.

~~I attended~~

I remember my first day at the San Francisco Art Institute. I was standing in line to register and as I looked up and down the line, I saw another Indian. I couldn't lose my place in the line so I didn't go up to him to introduce myself, to let him know he wasn't the only one. And it was a mistake

x

for me to not take that opportunity.
I never saw him again, and my life
at the Art Institute would have been
much easier with another Indian student.
And of course the art history classes
never covered anything ethnic or Indian.
Our view of the world is shaped by
what is accessible to us.
Indian art should be part of Art
History class. RC Gorman is as
important in my mind as Picasso.

I watch this television series called
Northern Exposure, not always because it
has great drama or writing which sometimes
it does but because there are Indian
people in the series. There is one primary
~~main~~ character who is Indian, and
then as you look at different scenes,
Indians are present. I've been reluctant
to ~~ex~~ thoroughly critique or analyze its
treatment of Indians because I want
to enjoy the idea of seeing ~~more~~
contemporary Indians on television.

To be invisible is a horrible thing. To be hated is a horrible thing. To lose your country is a horrible thing. To be objectified is a horrible thing.

Indian are still the people in this country who are utterly disrespected by the rest of you. It's quite that simple.

1992 can be your beginning, your participation in our healing. We do need you for our survival.

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1/18

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21

